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The odds that the project population would stay in school had been increased from 50-50 before the project to 3-1 at the time of this report. The chance of expulsion for disciplinary reasons was reduced from 1 in 3 to 1 in 15. Lennox High Schhol personnel felt that money invested to improve education for potential dropouts by adapting material and providing guidance would decrease the amount of funds which would later be used by social agencies to care for them.

Participants in the program were chosen on the basis of low achievement, anti-social behavior, low reading skills and poor attendance records. The program began in the ninth grade and consisted of group counseling and special classes. Counseling sessions dealt with home problems and feelings of inadequacy. The special classes consisted of one two-hour period per day in which English and social studies were emphasized. Instruction was not formal and was directed to the needs of the group. Special mimeographed materials, movies, tapes, and related activities were used to develop basic communication skills. Vocational material was also available to the student.

Teachers and counselors in the program were oriented through summer workshops.

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NEWS

VOLUME XIV Number 2 FEBRUARY 1965

Report on

The Dropout Project of Lennox High School

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Report on
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"We're finding out how much we don't know," is the cautious answer often given enthusiastic visitors to Lennox High School by Laban Strite, project director of the school's remarkable program for holding the potential dropout in school.

However, judging from widening interest in the program, and recognition of its effectiveness as "dramatic" by the Advisory Committee on Compensatory Education in its report to the California legislature recommending expansion of the McAteer Act, it may be that Lennox High School has taken a major step in effectively confronting one of America's most anxious social problems.

In citing results of the project, the Advisory Committee reported: "Dramatic evidence from the Centinela Valley project shows that, using high school counselor-teacher teams, their project increased the odds that their project population would stay in school from 50-50 to 3 to 1. The chance of expulsion for disciplinary reasons was reduced from 1 in 3 to 1 in 15."

To Strite, the youngster who fails to complete school is not only a dropout from school; he is a dropout from society.

"These youngsters are alien to the prevailing social structure, alienated by vicissitudes of their environment and experience," Strite observed. "No human is exempt in his lifetime from crises in personality development whose results spell either the destruction of the individual, or a continued path of progress in achievement. These youngsters have met such a crisis in the most vital period of personality development—youth."

In expressing the philosophic dynamics on which the program is based, Strite commented: "No human being ever performs to the top of his capacity unless the discipline, the motivation, is an internal one, self-directed. What we in essence are doing is re-directing the personality goals and conduct into constructive, productive channels, developing coping skills so that the individual may adapt himself to the demands of society rather than continue a pattern of futile and self-destructive assaults."

In successfully carrying out such a philosophy with the unending variation of human complexity presented by each individual, called essentially for two things: 1) a conceptual change on the part of administrators and staff as to the function of the public school in enlarging its role beyond that as solely a dispenser of knowledge; and, 2) the setting up of machinery for such a program within the framework of the American high school as it functions today.

ORIGIN OF THE PROGRAM

Strite conceived of the program as the result of his first year as a freshman class counselor when he found much of his time taken with handling of students repeatedly referred to him for similar patterns of offenses.

ON THE COVER—*Group counseling session of the Lennox High School project. Some 40 sessions are conducted throughout the school year with Laban Strite, project director, as counselor. Problems dealt with in these sessions develop out of crises and emergencies confronting students in daily living. Sessions are recorded on tapes. These furnish a record of progress, aid in studying individual dynamics, and serve to illustrate aspects of the program for Lennox' teaching staff.*

"No human is exempt in his lifetime from crises in personality development whose results spell either the destruction of the individual, or a continued path of progress in achievement. These youngsters have met such a crisis in the most vital period of personality development—youth."

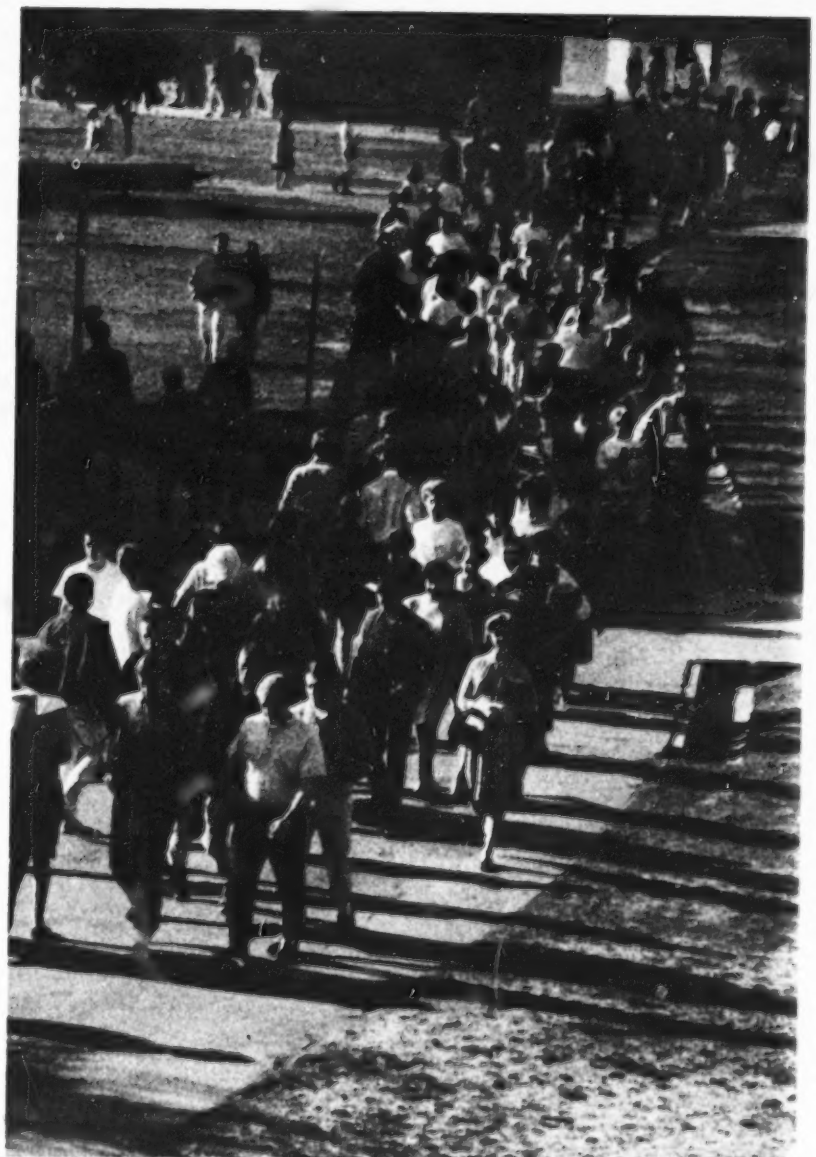
Project
nox High School

"We were not helping the school or teaching staff," Strite said. "Nor were we helping the youngster. It seemed that we were dealing only with symptoms, rather than the basic nature of the individual's problem. Well-meant admonitions and other corrective measures were as effective as offering a seriously ill person a sugar pill. Projecting the school future of these youngsters, it was evident that they probably would never finish high school, either dropping out of their own volition, or expressing their negativism through such acts as to require the school to drop them."

There was little precedent to back Strite's idea that a program could be instituted in a secondary school which could significantly reach the potential dropout. That it could be done was a gamble, but a gamble backed by Strite's studies in philosophy and psychology as well as perceptive observation of human personality. Presenting his hypothesis – and carefully pointing out that it was only a hypothesis – Strite proposed the basic idea of a program to Dr. Jefferson L. Garner, superintendent of the Centinela Valley Union High School District.

"The decision to back Strite's proposal," Dr. Garner commented, "was determined by two things: that one of our staff cared deeply enough about these youngsters to want to do something; and the realistic approach as outlined, both as to the cost and the possibility that we stood as good a chance of failing as we did of succeeding. But considering the stakes – the future of these youngsters – it was a gamble we couldn't afford not to take. That our gamble has paid off as one of the soundest investments ever made in youth is largely due to the vision, faith, hard work, and remarkable professional skill of the man who conceived the project."

The program began operation in the spring semester of 1962 with 15 boys. Its initial success in showing significant improvement in grades, citizenship, and attitude, suggested that it be continued. In 1963 the program was selected as one of 24 pilot projects in the State under the newly enacted McAteer Act, legislation



Between 1960 and 1970, 5.2 million youngsters–20.2 percent of America's 26 million youth–will not complete high school.

PROJECT PERSONNEL—*Left to right, Laban Strite, project director; Stephen Notari, assistant; Mrs. Mary Furr, boys' group teacher; Mrs. Gwen Emmons, girls' group teacher; Miss Jan Wieberg, girls' counselor; and Miss Edith Chapralis, assistant principal and supervising administrator. However specialized their work on the project, all serve in additional teaching, counseling, and administrative assignments.*

introduced by Senator "J" Eugene McAteer of San Francisco to give special assistance for providing positive approaches to the education of students whose under-achievement in school could be attributed to environmental conditions rather than physical or mental handicaps.

Known as "compensatory education," it is McAteer's concept that: "By providing such a program, society attempts to reach these children so that they will not become the dropouts and unemployed men and women of later years. Dollars spent on compensatory education are a wise investment in helping such children to prepare themselves to lead constructive lives. Such an investment will show returns to the state in terms of reduced welfare, police, correctional, unemployment and other similar costs."

The Lennox High School project continues this year, and has been extended to work with a group of 15 girls. Staff members of the project working with Strite are: Mrs. Mary Furr, teacher of the boys' special class; Mrs. Gwen Emmons, teacher of the girls' special class; Miss Jan Wieberg, counselor for the girls' group; Stephen Notari, assistant to Strite; and Miss Edith Chapralis, supervising administrator. Consultant for the project, as she has been since its inception, is Dr. Myrtle LeBow, Director of the Southwest Child Guidance Center in Hawthorne.

THREE BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

Three basic assumptions underlie the project:

1) These students are basically capable of responsible, self-determining behavior. If given the opportunity, they will be able to overcome, or at least, diminish whatever cultural, educational, or environmental deprivations they may have suffered previously.

2) A counseling relationship is offered that will provide these students an understanding and concern for them as persons, and aid them in developing insight as to responsible conduct in meeting their problems.

3) A special classroom situation is offered which will afford these students the opportunity to begin where they are achievement-wise, and to progress at a pace commensurate with their individual ability and need.

"In treating this student as a self-determining human being who can deal with his predicament if given an opportunity," Strite pointed out, "the total effort throughout the project is to place the burden of responsibility for learning upon the student after counselor and teacher have provided him with the realistic and necessary learning situation.

"There is neither time, effort, nor money to be spent in a sentimental, emotional approach. This is not a coddling process any more than we can say medical treatment or surgery is coddling. We might draw a further analogy with what we are trying to do by pointing out that 50—or only 15—years ago many died or were permanently disabled from physical maladies for which the medical man had neither diagnoses nor techniques for treatment. Today, with the continually expanding knowledge of the medical world, no stone is left un-

"What we in essence are doing is re-directing the personality goals and conduct into constructive, productive channels, developing coping skills so that the individual may adapt himself to the demands of society rather than continue a pattern of futile and self-destructive assaults."

turned to restore the physically ill person to full health.

"There is a parallel in that the rapidly expanding horizons of psychology now enable us to re-direct the potential forces of the negative individual, alienated from society, into positive channels of constructive achievement."

Selection of students for the program is based on six criteria:

1) absence of disabling physical or mental deficiences;

2) low or failing grades;

3) anti-social behavior and attitudes;

4) Low reading skills;

5) evidence of disruption in environment; and,

6) poor attendance record.

However much it is felt that a student would benefit from the program, no student is compelled to enter it. Each candidate is given a counseling session in which Strite candidly explains the program, realistically getting over to the student that his current attitudes offer little possibility of him finishing school. Stressed throughout this initial conference is the fact that the opportunity is being offered the student solely to help him, and that the counselor is personally concerned.

"Perhaps one of the most significant things in their acceptance of the reality of their position, indicates that these students are also accepting a basic responsibility," Strite said.

"In treating this student as a self-determining human being who can deal with his predicament if given an opportunity, the total effort throughout the project is to place the burden of responsibility for learning upon the student after counselor and teacher have provided him with the realistic and necessary learning situation."

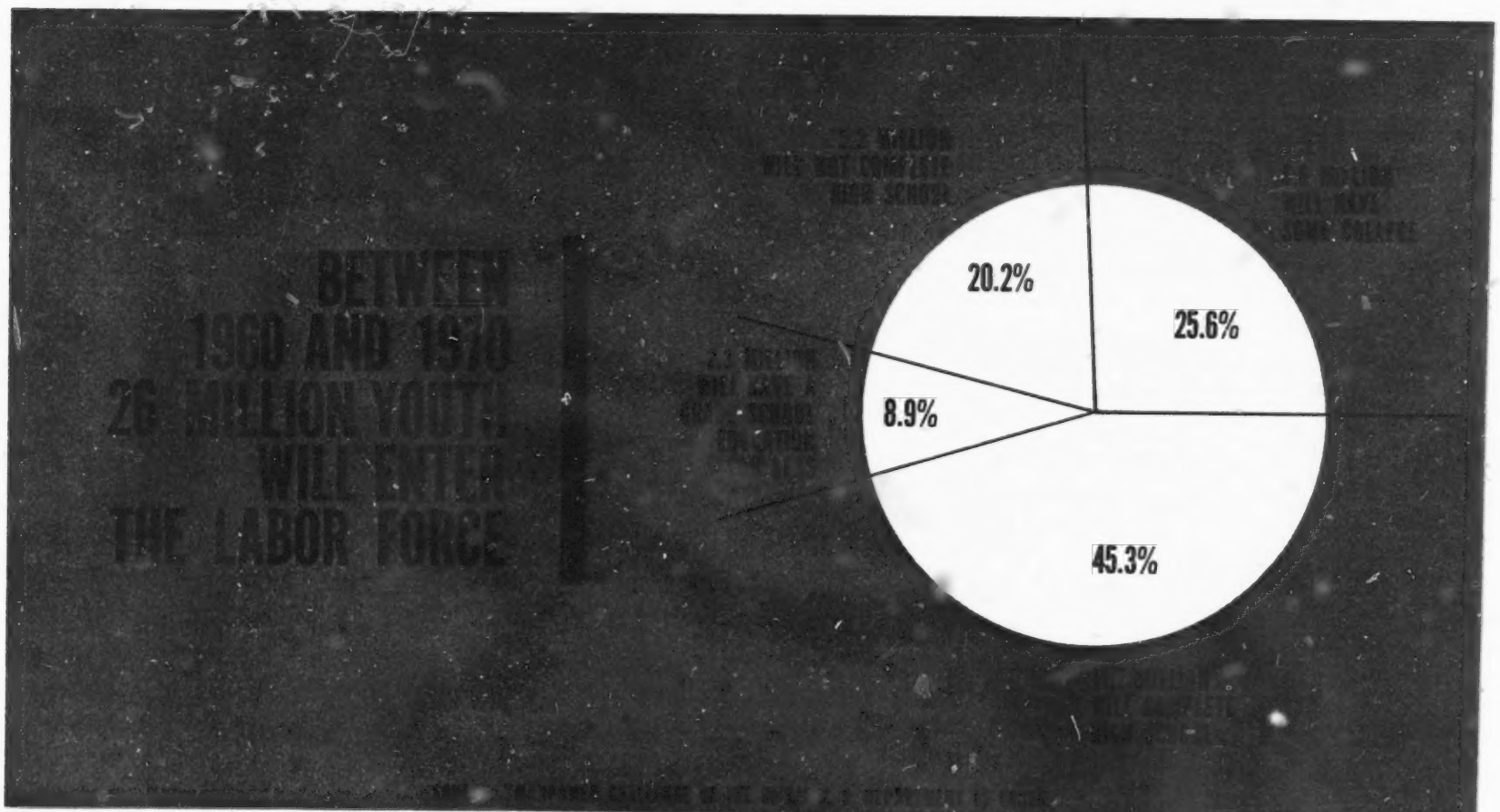
A complete case study is then made of each student based on grades and citizenship marks, evaluations by other teachers, and tests.

GROUP COUNSELING

As soon as students can be identified as eligible for the program after the first semester of the ninth grade their freshman year at Lennox High, they are formed into a group which meets daily for group counseling. Each student is encouraged to understand and accept his past experiences as a major element in making him what he is.

But the primary emphasis is to support him in making a personally meaningful and responsible appraisal of himself as a human being, particularly with reference to earning a high school diploma. These group counseling sessions are conducted over a three or four month period, or until it is felt that the group is ready to enter a special classroom situation.

Group counseling continues throughout the school year along with the special classroom. Some forty group sessions are conducted during the year. These sessions are not held to a definite schedule, but according to the demands of varying situations as they arise. Thus, the



are held with greater frequency during the first part of the year than during the latter part.

Problems dealt with in these counseling sessions develop out of daily crises and emergencies either at home or at school. Areas of discussion include the youngsters' concepts of inadequacy; feeling "dumb" or different from others; frustration and defeat regarding low grades and failure to achieve in other classes; negative reactions to school and personnel; and fears and negative attitudes regarding the future in terms of reality planning and long-range expectations.

Sessions are recorded on tapes, which furnish not only a record of progress, but serve in studying the dynamics expressed by individuals at each session. The tapes are also of value in training personnel on the project, as well as demonstrating aspects of the program to the regular teaching staff.

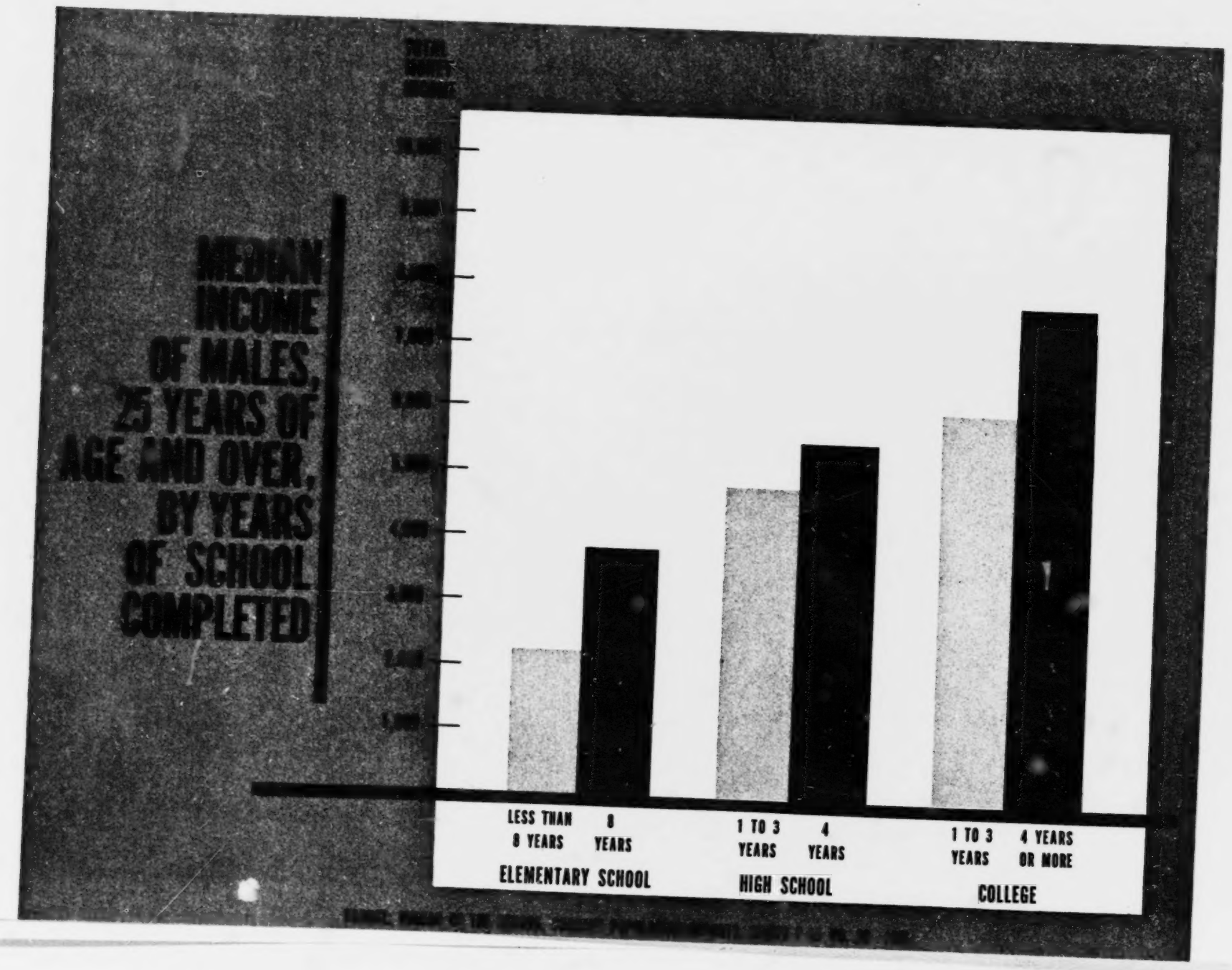
Each student is also given at least three individual counseling sessions; one as he enters the project, one as he enters the special classroom situation, and one at the end of the school year. Additional individual sessions are also given when the problem is either too intense or too personal to be dealt with in group sessions. As the youngsters mature through the group process, they require less and less individual attention of this nature.

Boys and girls are separated in both the group counseling and special classroom situation.

SPECIAL CLASSROOM

The classroom offering consists of one two-hour period. English and social studies are emphasized, adapted, however, primarily by the students to meet their individual requirements. Since the achievement goals are decidedly different from those expected or required in a normal classroom, formal instruction plays no part here.

"Since it is apparent that this student's resistance to traditional classroom procedures has been a major factor in his school failure, our purpose would be defeated in any attempt to carry on formal instruction," Strite observed. "We must beware of attempting to impose our own values as to what constitutes achievement for this student. At this stage the teacher of these classes faces the difficult task of leading the student to discover what is truly meaningful to him, material that has substance and pertinent value for him, that will give him the taste of success, of achievement.


MEDIAN INCOME OF MALES, 25 YEARS OF AGE AND OVER, BY YEARS OF SCHOOL COMPLETED
LESS THAN 8 YEARS
8 YEARS
1 TO 3 YEARS
4 YEARS
1 TO 3 YEARS
4 YEARS OR MORE
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
HIGH SCHOOL
COLLEGE

"In effect, we are directing the student's perceptions toward accepting his own responsibility. Recognizing that the will to achieve is a normal human endowment, the youngster, in selecting his own work, cannot blame the teacher if he should fail. And, in the same light, he sees that his success is his own product. We are finding that the positive attitudes developed in this class will be transferred to classes of the regular school program."

As may be expected in such a program, subject matter covers a wide latitude. There is, however, a body of material providing a reading level range matching any particular level of anyone in the group, plus specially prepared mimeographed materials, movies, tapes, and related activities.

An English activity, for example, may call for the youngsters to tell a story concerning themselves. This is recorded on tape. The tapes are then transcribed, and the student works over the copy for correction of errors. The transcription of the tapes also serves to give him a visual impact of his spoken word.

Music—classic, semi-classic, jazz, and the latest popular offerings—also plays an important part in apparently offering another medium for identification or expression of what the students are feeling.

Also available to students is a wealth of vocational material relating to the practical aspects of the job world he will encounter on graduation from high school.

In accordance with this classroom approach, students are not marked in the traditional grading system, but given credit for growth—either in academic work, or attitude.

Although the goal of the program is to bring about acceptable attitudes and social behavior, one-third of last year's group showed marked improvement in academic work in other classes.

ROLE OF THE TEACHER

In addition to group counseling of the boys, one of Strite's major responsibilities is counseling teachers working with the group, interpreting to them the significance of behavior of project students as they progress through the year.

Teachers and counselors who enter the program are given an orientation session through workshops held in

"In seeking to reach this alienated youngster, it might be said we are grappling for a more skillful means of interpreting what he seeks and needs, plus a way of communication—but within his framework of reference rather than ours."

Project Director

A formidable scholar who has been known to discomfit a college professor by reading of abstruse philosophical works in their native language while the professor was still wading through English reviews of the work; a *cum laude* graduate in Philosophy from Bridgewater College, Virginia; and currently working towards his Ph.D. in Educational Psychology, Laban Strite, project director of the Lennox High School program, may be said to have a thorough background in academic fundamentals.

But perhaps more important are the richly varied living experiences of the 36 year-old Strite which bring a realistic approach, and a perceptive warmth and depth to the underlying humanistic philosophy of the project.

At 16, Strite, a Maryland farm boy, shipped with the American merchant marine at the end of World War II with the rating of "Cattleman" as an escort to 500 head of cattle destined to Yugoslavia via Trieste.

What was to have been an uneventful 30 day voyage turned out to be a harrowing experience of three months in Italy with Strite's being officially listed by the Red Cross as "Disposition Unknown."

His eventual return home indefinitely postponed plans for a memorial service to be held by family and friends who had presumed his demise on foreign shores.

On this and a subsequent trip to Europe via merchant marine, Strite also earned ratings of "Wiper," "Messman," and "Fireman," ratings he still holds.

Between high school graduation and college, Strite found time for a hitch-hike tour of the United States, working as a grocery clerk, learning the printing trade, and serving nearly a year as a member of a church-sponsored Peace Caravan which toured 200 churches discussing world affairs with youth groups.

On graduation from college, he spent four years as an ordained minister in the remote hills of West Virginia where his pastoral duties included the spiritual shepherding of a community of moonshine distillers.

Attracted to California by a scholarship, Strite found his interests turning to education and psychology. In addition to his work in the Centinela Valley Union High School District, and his teaching of psychology this past year at Mt. San Antonio College, he also practices supervised clinical testing and counseling with a San Gabriel Valley psychologist.

the summer. The philosophical concept is stressed in order to give participating personnel an understanding of the dynamics of this type of student. Case histories are studied, and, in so far as possible, basic methods and approaches.

"One of the most difficult aspects is that one cannot pass on to teachers, as in other teaching situations, an established, sure-fire body of techniques," Strite commented. "What works today will not necessarily work tomorrow; what works with one group will not necessarily work with another group; what works with one individual will not necessarily work with another.

"The Lennox High project has been exceptionally fortunate in having such skilled teachers of the special classroom as Mrs. Furr and Mrs. Emmons whose patience, flexibility, hard work, and human understanding have borne such fruitful results."

Keynote to working with these youngsters for both counselor and teacher is complete honesty; giving the student the feeling of acceptance as human beings, recognition of human dignity; and conveying to them that there are adults who will go to bat for them in a crisis.

Commenting on the demands of teaching such a class, one teacher observed: "You play it by ear. There has been nothing in all of your previous teacher training or years of classroom experience to prepare you. You are on your own, confronting each student on his own, rather than from behind the security of texts and the customary pedagogical framework that buttresses the teacher in a traditional classroom setting. You are in the arena with these youngsters face to face with them as human beings; you are learning things about them; you are learning things about yourself.

"Prepare as you will, you must also be prepared as a human being to survive the frustration of failure when your most carefully prepared plans fall apart; prepared

"No human being ever performs to the top of his capacity unless the discipline, the motivation, is an internal one, self-directed."

to pick up the pieces of a day, a week, and carry on. An ideal background for the teacher here would include sociology, anthropology—and psychology."

What the youngster achieves is not as important as *how* he achieves, his attitudes and approaches in reaching a goal.

"Although we are continually searching for materials that might be more readily adaptable for these youngsters," Strite said, "we must also consider whether there can ever be a body of fundamental material which could be relied on as a solid, infallible groundwork as we have in other courses. We may find that in the end, it is the resourcefulness, the skill, the understanding, of the individual teacher that in the long run is the paramount consideration. In seeking to reach this alienated youngster, it might be said we are grappling for a more skillful means of interpreting what he seeks and needs, plus a way of communication—but within his framework of reference rather than ours."

What each youngster derives from the program is one of those human immeasurables that no statistic or observation can fully evaluate. The essential fact is not only has he – a potential dropout – remained in school, but that he has remained of his own volition; and that the experience – rather than merely a holding operation of the school, a static filling in of time – has been one of positive development and achievement, relating him not only to the school world, but the world facing him upon graduation.

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